

# ZJER

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# AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN SPORT BY LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS.

**Tapiwa Mudyahoto and Francis Emson Dakwa**  
Great Zimbabwe University

## **Abstract**

*The practice of physical activity goes beyond providing access to programmes and making accommodations to support participation. It embraces the principle of non discrimination of persons with disabilities and promotion of equity. In this paper, the authors attempt to discuss the extent to which learners with disabilities participate in sport within inclusive settings. Questionnaires and interviews were administered to the teacher and pupil samples, hence, a quantitative and qualitative approach was adopted for the study. Results revealed that children with disabilities were being sidelined with regards to participation in sport. It also emerged that specially trained personnel and material resources were not available to enhance the objective of inclusive physical activity. The need for in-house training for regular school teachers is vital. Sporting environments and equipment should be adapted to facilitate participation of children with disabilities in inclusive sporting activities.*

## **Background**

The extent to which individuals with diverse disabilities are included in physical activities and other segments of our society has been, and continues to be influenced by society's perceptions and attitudes towards these individuals. (Kasser and Lytle, 2005). Most of the children with disabilities do not experience the thrill of sport or physical education due to visual, mental or locomotive limitations. According to Churches (1980), the teaching of physical education and sport in the schools poses a challenge because some of the teachers lack the training and know how to handle children with disabilities in inclusive sporting activities. However, some private schools like Peterhouse and St. Georges College in Harare have done very well in the teaching of sport to children with disabilities in inclusive settings. It is the intention of this study to examine the extent to which learners with disabilities have been included in sporting activities.

Inclusion is a practice that calls for all individuals, regardless of ability or

disability to participate in activities within the same environment with necessary support and individual attention (Kirk et al; 2006; Kasser and Lytle; 2005. Heward and Orlansky, 2009). The Salamanca Statement (1994) advocates for the inclusion of all children, regardless of individual differences and needs. The Jomtien Conference (1990) recommends the need to allow access to educational activities to all children, despite their disabilities.

In Zimbabwe, the Education Act (2006 Revised) also echoes the right of every child to school education and to participate in all school activities despite their abilities or disabilities, racial and ethnic differences or whatever background they may come from. This is further corroborated in the Zimbabwe Disabled Persons Act (1992) which affirms that there should be no discrimination in accessibility, not only in education but also in social and sporting activities.

Inclusive physical activity is the principle and practice of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of ability and age, have equal opportunity in physical activity. (Kasser and Lytle, 2005; Kanhukamwe and Madondo, 2000; Kaine 1992). Inclusive physical activity is defined as accessible physical activity across the lifespan of diverse settings (Kasser and Lytle, 2005). Inclusive physical activity embodies the following activities:

- Infant and toddler movement (experiences and activities)
- School based physical education programmes
- Community based recreation and leisure activities
- Exercise and fitness programmes
- Multilateral sport opportunities (Kasser and Lytle, 2005; Depauw and Doll-Tepper, 2000).

The study seeks to determine the level of participation in sport by learners with disabilities in inclusive environments.

Sporting activities need to be modified to cater for individual disabilities. At school levels, the age of pupils at both primary and secondary levels should be accommodated in the sporting adaptations (Depauw and Doll-Tepper, 2000; Kennedy and Fitzgerald, 1995). According to Kasser and Lytle, 2005, accommodations are made within programmes to ensure that both highly skilled and lesser skilled individuals participate, receive the benefits of tailored instruction and optimal programming. Implementing sporting accommodations ensures that individual interests and needs are considered (Hahn, 1988) Inclusive physical activity values, accepts, supports and respects each person for what he or she brings to the situation (Kasser and Lytle, 2005).

As children with disabilities engage in sport with their colleagues in the regular school or class, they interact, hence, socialization is enhanced. Mapepa et al (2004) recommend the need for mobility and orientation training for learners with visual impairment. This will enable these children to move about freely as they orient themselves to appropriate sporting environments and activities. A regular school/ class would be defined as the ordinary school or class for children without disabilities. Heiward and Orlansky 2009; Winzer 1996; Kirk et. al., 2006).

Children with disabilities need to be supported as they participate in sport in inclusive settings Haralambos and Holborn (1995) confirm that human beings make their responses to the action of other people by actively interacting with them. This study, therefore, intends to analyse the level to which children with disabilities participate in sport in inclusive environments.

According to Grigsgono (1991), sport for learners with disabilities needs to be properly organised so that all children benefit and have an understanding of the activities. Schools can offer sporting activities like soccer, volleyball, gymnastics and tennis which can be taught to learners with disabilities provided adaptations have been made to the sporting environments and equipment. These games, however, would need to be adapted to suit the needs of children with disabilities (Kaine, 1992). The purpose of adapting methods and activities for children with disabilities is meant to afford them the same experiences and opportunities as those enjoyed by their peers without disabilities. Kanhukamwe and Madondo (2000) concur that children with disabilities can participate in a variety of activities if these are adapted to suit their unique needs. In light of this, the study seeks to examine the level of participation in sport by learners with disabilities in inclusive settings.

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted in the urban and peri urban areas of Masvingo in Zimbabwe. These areas were selected because of organised sporting activities which included specific areas of disabilities like visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disability.

The research was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent do learners with disabilities participate in sport in inclusive settings?

- In what sporting activities do children with disabilities participate?
- What obstacles hinder effective participation in sporting by children with disabilities in regular school environments?

Permission was sought from the Ministry of Education Sport and Culture to conduct the study. The samples included heads of 5 schools where children with disabilities took part in sporting activities with their colleagues in the mainstream. The disabilities involved were visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disabilities. 20 teachers who included sportsmasters were also sampled. Purposive sampling was applied here because the sportsmasters were involved in sporting activities and actively assisted children with disabilities as they took part. The twenty teachers were also purposively sampled because the children with disabilities in question were in the teachers' classes, hence, the teachers took part in the inclusion of the children with disabilities in regular settings. 30 children with disabilities and 20 teachers constituted the teacher and pupil samples. Random sampling was employed on the children because the number of children with disabilities who participated in sporting activities in regular schools exceeded the sample.

Sportsmasters and heads of institutions were interviewed to obtain their views on modalities involved in including children with disabilities in the regular school. Questionnaires were administered on the teachers and pupils. It was understood that teachers and pupils would provide detailed information on the sporting activities in which children with disabilities participated with their counterparts.

## **Results and Discussion**

Most heads interviewed indicated that there was segregation in sporting activities. Children with physical disabilities were excluded from competitive sports because they were regarded as slow and incompetent and, therefore, would retard the progress of the other pupils without disabilities. The issue of discrimination also featured in the pupil sample, where children with visual impairments and hearing impairments echoed the sentiments of their colleagues who feared to participate with children with disabilities for fear of being contaminated. The issue of discrimination is voiced by the Salamanca Statement (1994), where the aspect of equity is emphasized in order to accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities. In concurrence, Kasser and Lytle (2005) embraced the belief in experiential equity in which there exists a balance of opportunity consideration. In other words, where equity exists the

child with a disability is recognised as an equal partner in sporting activities and will benefit maximally from participation in inclusive sporting activities. Kristensen (1993) further asserts that children with disabilities may hesitate to engage in sport in a society that teases them.

It also emerged from the study that there were no conducive sporting environments and there was no suitable sporting equipment to support inclusive sporting activities. This was quite evident in the institutions where children with physical disabilities were participating in sport. Children with visual impairments also complained that there were no audible balls and that sporting gadgets were not inscribed in Braille. (raised dots) , hence, they could not read the instructions and labels. The heads. of institutions also concurred that they faced difficulties in obtaining suitable sporting equipment to enhance the participation of children with disabilities in inclusive settings. There was need for adaptations to both the sporting environments (grounds) as well as the equipment to be used in inclusive sporting activities. Gangopadhyay (1993) recommends that there should be adapted and suitable facilities of all kinds that are necessary for the successful conduct of various physical activities in schools. This would consequently enable children with disabilities to confidently take part in sport within inclusive settings. The Salamanca Statement (1994) categorically states that children with special learning needs should be accommodated in all activities in the regular school systems. This would also enhance their participation in both sporting and other classroom activities with their colleagues in an inclusive environment.

Most of the teachers indicated that children with disabilities were being snubbed by their colleagues during sporting activities. Children with hearing impairments could participate with their counterparts in games like football, volleyball and basketball. However, they faced communication problems because the other children did not understand sign language. This scenario created isolation and negative attitudes that hindered smooth participation of children with disabilities in inclusive sports. Children with physical disabilities needed to engage in wheelchair sports which were not included in the school systems. Failure to take part in the other sporting activities at the schools led to negative attitudes where their counterparts regarded them as incompetent. According to Kanhukamwe and Madondo (2000), involving children with physical disabilities in sporting activities increased their laterality (internal knowledge of the difference between the left and right side of the body), and directionality (awareness of left and right in the



environment, outside the body). Winzer (1996) and Kasser and Lytle (2005) also emphasize the need for all individuals to be given the opportunity to participate in age appropriate and ability appropriate activities.

It also emerged from the study that most teachers in the regular schools or classes were not specially trained to assist children with disabilities in sporting activities. Children with visual impairments and hearing impairments voiced concerns that teachers could neither read braille nor understand sign language. This impeded training of children with disabilities in sporting activities. Heads of institutions indicated that lack of specialised training led teachers to overprotect the children during sporting sessions. Mawer (1993) believes that for effective teaching to occur, the teachers need to have a sound knowledge of the activities they are about to teach. According to Kasser and Lytle (2005), inclusion is more than just simply placing individuals together to participate in inclusive sporting. It is a conviction that all individuals belong and are valued (Depauw and Doll-Teppe, 2000, Dakwa, 2009).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study concluded that learners with disabilities did not participate fully in sporting activities within inclusive settings. Progress was hampered by lack of trained personnel, adapted sporting environments and equipment. The study also concluded that there were negative perceptions on disability.

The Ministry of Education Sport and Culture should spearhead the training of sport specialist personnel who will be knowledgeable about handling sporting systems involving children with disabilities within inclusive environments.

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